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Sinner and Aryna claim their first titles at Indian Wells

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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No deal with Iran for transit of Indian ships via Hormuz: EAM

Govt denies report of Iran seeking its tankers

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

India does not have a "blanket arrangement" with Iran for the transit of Indian-flagged vessels through the strategic Strait of Hormuz, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said, stressing that every ship's movement is handled on a case-by-case basis.

Tehran reportedly asked India to release three Iran-linked tankers seized in February, as part of talks aimed at ensuring the safe passage of Indian-flagged or India-bound vessels through the strait, Reuters reported. However, Centre denied this, calling the report baseless.

Indian authorities had detained the ships near Indian waters, alleging they had concealed or altered their identities and were involved in illegal ship-to-ship transfers at sea.

Jaishankar said negotiations between New Delhi and Tehran had already enabled two Indian-flagged tankers to pass through the key shipping route.

The strait, one of the world's most important energy corridors, has seen traffic slow to a near standstill since the outbreak of war involving Iran. Despite the disruption, Iranian authorities recently allowed two Indian liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tankers to transit the passage.

According to one source and an Iranian official, Tehran has also sought supplies of certain medicines and medical equipment as part of the discussions. Iran's ambassador in New Delhi met officials of India's external affairs ministry on Monday to discuss the issue.

India said at least 22 Indian-flagged vessels and 611 Indian seafarers remain in the Gulf region. Six of the ships are carrying LPG, and New Delhi is keen to prioritise their passage to ease domestic shortages. Nearly 90 per cent of India's LPG imports come from Gulf countries.

Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy in Tehran has advised Indian nationals in Iran not to approach or attempt to cross any land border without prior coordination. It warned that travellers leaving without embassy guidance could face serious logistical and immigration difficulties, and shared helpline numbers for assistance. —*PTI*

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WEST ASIA WAR DAY-17

OVER 4,334 DOMESTIC & 1,187 INT'L FLIGHTS IN INDIA CANCELLED SINCE START OF WAR

INDIA EVACUATED OVER 550 NATIONALS FROM IRAN VIA ARMENIA

Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravorty, Home Secretary Jagdish Prasad Meena, DGP Peeyush Pandey, Kolkata Police Commissioner Supratim Sarkar and ADG (Law and Order) Vineet Goyal

EC removes top babus, cops in Bengal ahead of polls

KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

In an unprecedented administrative overhaul ahead of next month's Assembly elections, the Election Commission of India (EC) has transferred West Bengal's top bureaucratic and police officials, including the chief secretary and the director general of police.

The move, considered the largest such reshuffle in the state's administrative history, came hours after the poll panel announced the election schedule on Sunday. Officials removed include Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravorty, Home Secretary Jagdish Prasad Meena, DGP Peeyush Pandey, Kolkata Police Commissioner Supratim Sarkar and ADG (Law and Order) Vineet Goyal. They have been barred from holding election-related posts until the completion of the polls.

- EC officials said the decision was aimed at ensuring administrative neutrality and preventing violence during the high-stakes polls.

The EC appointed Dushyant Nariala as the new chief secretary and Sanghamitra Ghosh as home secretary. Siddh Nath Gupta was named DGP, while Ajay Kumar Nand was appointed commissioner of Kolkata Police. Ajay Mukund Ranade replaced Goyal as ADG (Law and Order), and Natarajan Ramesh Babu was appointed DG (Correctional Services).

The commission directed that the transfers be implemented immediately and sought confirmation of the officers assuming charge by 3 pm on Monday.

EC officials said the decision was aimed at ensuring administrative neutrality and preventing violence during the high-stakes polls. Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar had earlier assured that elections in the state would be peaceful and warned officials to strictly follow constitutional provisions and EC guidelines.

The Assembly elections in West Bengal will be held in two phases on 23 and 29 April, with counting scheduled for 4 May. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

LS Speaker likely to revoke suspension of 8 Oppn MPs

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

The suspension of eight opposition MPs from the Lok Sabha is likely to be revoked on Tuesday, sources said after a meeting convened by Speaker Om Birla. Seven Congress MPs and CPI(M)'s S Ventakesan were suspended on 3 February for unruly behaviour during the first part of the Budget session. Opposition parties have demanded revocation since the second leg began on 9 March. Both sides agreed no member would enter the well, tear papers, throw them at the chair or climb officials' tables. Birla expressed "deep concern" over banners, placards and language used by some MPs, urging leaders to maintain discipline and ethical conduct in the House. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Puri's daughter moves HC over 'false' Epstein links

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH'

Himayani Puri, daughter of Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri, has moved the Delhi High Court seeking removal of allegedly "false" and "defamatory" social media content linking her to convicted American sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The case is likely to be heard this week. In her suit, Himayani Puri has sought Rs 10 crore in damages and an order restraining entities from disseminating defamatory material. She alleged there was a "coordinated online campaign" attempting to link her to Epstein and demanded an unconditional apology and retraction from the defendants. She also urged the court to direct social media intermediaries, including Google, X, Meta Platforms and LinkedIn, to remove such content when flagged. It is rumoured that allegations that Real Partners LLC, where Puri was employed, received funds from Epstein or his associates. — *PTI*

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar and BJP National President Nitin Nabin are among the winners —*PTI*

NDA sweeps Bihar RS polls, Odisha sees cross-voting

PATNA, 16 MARCH

Nitish Kumar's NDA secured all five Rajya Sabha seats from Bihar on Monday as Nitin Nabin of BJP, Union Minister Ram Nath Thakur of JD(U), BJP leader Shivesh Kumar, Upendra Kushwaha of RLM and another NDA nominee were declared elected, an official said.

BJP leader Nabin and the other candidates won the Rajya Sabha elections comfortably, said Khyati Singh, secretary of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha and returning officer for the polls.

With numbers firmly in favour of the NDA for four seats and slightly short for the fifth, the Opposition had forced a contest by fielding Amarendra Dhari Singh of the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Meanwhile, cross-voting was reported in neighbouring Odisha during Rajya Sabha elections being held after a gap of 12 years. According to Bhakta Charan Das, president of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee, three Congress MLAs — Ramesh Jena, Dasarathi Gomango and Sofia Firdous — voted in favour of a BJP-backed Independent candidate.

The MLAs had earlier stayed at Wonderla Resort near Bengaluru under the supervision of Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. They arrived on 12 March and left by bus on 15 March to return to Odisha for voting.

Karnataka Congress sources said two people were detained at the resort after allegedly attempting to bribe the MLAs with blank cheques and offers of Rs 5 crore each to induce cross-voting. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Assembly passes Bill to regulate hoardings, levy fee on ads

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

The Karnataka Assembly on Monday passed an amendment Bill aimed at regulating outdoor advertisements and enabling municipal bodies to collect fees on hoardings and billboards.

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly adopted the Karnataka Municipalities and Certain Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, moved by Urban Development and Town Planning Minister BS Suresha.

The legislation empowers municipal councils and corporations to levy an advertisement fee on any person who exhibits, fixes or displays an advertisement on land, buildings, walls, hoardings or other structures within municipal limits. The fee will be determined by local bodies, subject to minimum and maximum rates prescribed by the state government.

However, the Bill provides exemptions for advertisements about public meetings of municipalities or corporations, elections to legislative bodies and candidature in such elections.

It also mandates the display of advertisements in any municipal area by obtaining written permission from the concerned municipal council or corporation commissioner after payment of the prescribed fee. Permission will not be granted if the advertisement violates municipal by-laws or if the applicable fee has not been paid.

The amendment authorises municipal authorities to remove unauthorised advertisements displayed violating provisions.

According to the provisions, unauthorised advertisements will attract penalties and fines —*ANI*

According to the provisions, unauthorised advertisements will attract penalties and fines. Those who delay payment of advertisement fees or penalties will also be liable to pay interest at 18 per cent per annum from the date the payment becomes due until it is cleared.

Authorities may recover dues in a manner, similar to the recovery of property tax. — *PTI*

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Rallies held in Leh, and Kargil after Wangchuk's release

LEH, 16 MARCH

Two days after the release of activist Sonam Wangchuk, rallies were held in Leh and Kargil towns on Monday on a call given by agitating groups to press the Centre for early resumption of talks on their demands for statehood and extension of the Sixth Schedule to Ladakh.

Kargil and adjoining Drass also observed a complete shutdown, even as security was tightened across the Union Territory in view of the protest call given by Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) — the two groups that are spearheading the agitation over the past five years.

No untoward incident was reported from anywhere, officials said.

It was the first major rally by LAB since violence had erupted during protests in September, prompting a clampdown by authorities.

The LAB and KDA had called the protest before Wangchuk's release to demand the next round of talks with the Union Home Ministry, as promised during the High-Powered Committee meeting. —*PTI*

Man killed in front of his kids in B'luru

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

A 45-year-old mechanic was allegedly beaten to death in front of his children following a quarrel over a trivial issue here, police said on Monday.

The deceased is Rasheed, who worked at a garage in the Wilson Garden area.

Seven people, including the main accused Parvez, have been arrested in murder that occurred on Sunday evening.

A video of the attack was circulated on social media. According to police, Rasheed and Parvez allegedly argued over some work related to construction. During the altercation, Parvez allegedly hit Rasheed on the leg with a bat. Ahmed fell to the ground and hit his head on the pavement, resulting in his death. —PTI

INDIA SAYS REPORT IS BIASED

US panel calls for sanctions against RSS

NEW YORK, 16 MARCH

A US federal commission has flagged India to be designated a "Country of Particular Concern" for "engaging in and tolerating systematic, egregious religious freedom violations." The commission called for targeted US sanctions against entities like the RSS and RAW.

India on Monday rejected the claims made in the report, with MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal calling it "motivated" and biased, accusing it of presenting a distorted picture based on questionable sources. Jaiswal said that "instead of selective criticism on India", USCIRF should reflect on the vandalism and attacks on Hindu temples in the US.

US recommended targeted sanctions on groups such as RSS for severely violating religious freedom —*PTI*

The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan US federal government agency. It makes policy recommendations to the US President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

In its annual report, the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended targeted sanctions on groups that "severely violate religious freedom" like the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), "by freezing those individuals' or entities' assets and/or barring their entry into the United States."

The commission further called on Congress to pass the Transnational Repression Reporting Act of 2024 to track Indian government-led repression of religious minorities in the US. Recommending that US security and trade policies toward India be conditioned on religious freedom.

The report claims the event that triggered the India-Pakistan war ultimately led to a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment and targeted attacks within India. —*PTI*

98th ACADEMY AWARDS

1. Best Picture: 'One Battle After Another'

2. Best Director: Paul Thomas Anderson ('One Battle After Another')

'One Battle After Another' won big at this year's Oscars with six awards. Ryan Coogler's 'Sinners' followed with four wins, while 'Frankenstein' secured three. Here are the big winners:

The other awards bagged by 'ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER' are: Best supporting actor (Sean Penn), Best casting, Best adapted screenplay, Best film editing

3. Best Actress: Jessie Buckley ('Hamnet')

4. Best Actor: Michael B Jordan ('Sinners')

5. Best Original Screenplay: Ryan Coogler ('Sinners')

Veteran Bollywood actor Dharmendra, who died in November 2025, was not mentioned during the 'In Memoriam' section, despite being included in the Academy's official online list.

>>>More on Page 6

Netas seek flights from Kalaburagi and Bidar districts

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

Several ministers on Monday urged airlines to launch regular air services to Kalaburagi and Bidar during a meeting held at Vidhana Soudha. The meeting was attended by ministers MB Patil, Sharanaprakash R Patil, Priyank Kharge and Rahim Khan, along with Ajay Singh, representatives of airlines including IndiGo, Air India, Alliance Air, Star Air and Akasa Air, and senior officials R Vishal and Kushbu Choudary. Discussions focused on operational feasibility and utilising facilities managed by the Airports Authority of India, including the 742-acre airport developed in Kalaburagi since 2019. Airlines said they were assessing operations, with some exploring flights from Kalaburagi to Hyderabad and return services to Bengaluru. The MEEinisters asked airlines to submit firm quotes and proposed flight timings for Bengaluru–Kalaburagi and Bengaluru–Bidar routes by 23 March, after which a final decision will be taken. *—PTI*

Karnataka to have centralised ambulance system

BENGALURU , 16 MARCH

The Karnataka government is set to implement a centralised ambulance management system under the unified emergency helpline number '112', Medical Education & Skill Development Minister Sharanprakash Patil announced in the Legislative Council on Monday. The Minister said the new system is expected to be fully operational within three months, with technical integration currently in progress. He said the government would directly take over the centralised management of all state ambulances under the '112' platform to ensure faster and more effective emergency healthcare delivery. Further stating that recruitment of supporting staff for ambulance services would also be undertaken by the state government shortly, the Minister assured the House that Karnataka's ambulance fleet meets the standards prescribed by the Central Government and that there is no shortage of ambulances to cater to patients in the state.*—PTI*

Speaker exits Assembly over unanswered queries

This was after Parameshwara tabled 84 replies to 230 queries

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly witnessed an unusual development on Monday when Speaker UT Khader adjourned the House and walked out, expressing displeasure over the inadequate number of written replies submitted by government departments to questions raised by legislators.

The move, described by many legislators as "unprecedented", came after Home Minister G Parameshwara tabled only 84 written replies to 230 'unstarred' questions submitted by MLAs.

The Speaker had earlier cautioned the government on the issue. On Friday, he had admonished the administration, warning that his "gentleness" should not be mistaken for "weakness", and had asked departments to ensure that replies were provided to questions raised by legislators. Over the past week, he had repeatedly urged the government to address the matter.

Soon after the written replies were tabled, opposition members from the Bharatiya Janata Party, including Leader of Opposition R Ashoka, raised the issue in the House, pointing out that the situation had not improved despite repeated warnings from the Chair.

Speaker in the Karnataka Assembly UT Khader presiding over the House on Monday–*PTI*

"Not even 50 per cent of the questions were answered. You have warned them four times already; do it for the fifth time and make it a record. This government is dead," Ashoka said, accusing officials of ignoring directions from the Speaker.

Expressing strong displeasure, Khader said he had issued "clear orders" from the Chair on four occasions but there had been no improvement.

"This House is not for ministers. The session is held for legislators, who meet once in three months to discuss issues in their constituencies," he said.

He noted that out of the many questions submitted by MLAs, only 15 are taken up as 'starred' questions to be answered on the floor each day, while the remaining 'unstarred' questions are meant to receive written replies.

"If those questions go unanswered, why should MLAs come to this House?" he asked.

Declaring that the situation could not continue, Khader said he would not conduct proceedings until the concerned ministers and secretaries offered a proper explanation.

When the House resumed later, the Speaker said a meeting involving the Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition, a senior minister, the Chief Secretary and other senior officials had been held. It was decided that replies to MLAs' questions must be ensured and that appropriate action would be taken. *—PTI*

Yadgir woman kills self after social boycott

YADGIR, 16 MARCH

A 46-year-old woman died by suicide in Yadgir district after her family was allegedly socially boycotted by their community over her son's illicit relationship.

The deceased, Kamalamma, a resident of Girinagar, died by suicide on the night of 14 March in Joladadagi village, where she had gone to stay with her daughter.

Wadgera sub-inspector Maheboob Ali told Salar News that a few months ago leaders of the Sillekyata community had imposed a fine and socially boycotted Kamalamma's family for 10 years. The action was taken after her son, Erriswamy, was accused of having an illicit relationship with a pregnant woman from the same community. Erriswamy was already married at the time.

According to the complaint, the family was asked to vacate their house, leave the locality and refrain from speaking to anyone. Community members were warned that anyone interacting with them would also face a boycott.

Yadgir Superintendent of Police Prithvik Shankar said the community leaders had also allegedly barred the family from fishing and selling fish, their main source of livelihood, severely affecting their finances.

Police have arrested two people and are searching for three others. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support. *—Salar News*

QUOTA DEMAND

Members of the Madiwala community protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Monday, demanding their inclusion in the Scheduled Castes list. The community claims that they are listed as SC in 18 states but classified as Backward Class in Karnataka, depriving them of educational and employment opportunities –*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Chinnaswamy gets govt nod for IPL matches

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

The Karnataka government gave formal approval to the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA)and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) on Monday to host the 2026 Indian Premier League matches at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, ending months of uncertainty following the stampede after the RCB'S maiden title win.

The 19th edition of the world's biggest T20 league begins on 28 March with defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru set to face Sunrisers Hyderabad in their first match here at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

The approval came after a meeting chaired by Karnataka home minister Parameshwar with the expert committee, which was constituted by the state government, and representatives from the KSCA, RCB and their event management firm DNA.

"During the meeting the Expert Committee presented its report outlining the preparedness and compliance measures undertaken at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium," KSCA's official spokesperson Vinay Mruthyunjaya informed in a statement.

Based on the recommendations of the expert committee and after reviewing the arrangements in detail, the Home Minister formally accorded approval. *—PTI*

5 held for helping students open mule bank accounts

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

Five men were arrested for luring students with false promises of scholarships to make them open mule bank accounts, police said on Monday. The suspects are Vakdoth Vakeel, 24, Raju, 23, Zeeshan Ansari, 22, Akash, 32, and Sahil, 22, they said. Vakdoth and Raju approached students staying inSp a hostel here. Police said that after misleading them with false promises of scholarships, the duo made the students open accounts Bank of Maharashtra's branch in Gadag city. The suspects provided the initial deposit of Rs 2,000 for each account. Later, they collected the passbooks, ATM cards, internet banking details, and SIM cards. After a tip-off that Vakdoth and Raju were going to Goa to hand over the passbooks, ATM cards, SIM cards, and internet banking user IDs and passwords, they were nabbed. They said they went to Goa to discuss the commission for the eight new bank accounts with one Kumar. Kumar has not been traced. Three others were also arrested. *—PTI*

NO SPACE FOR CEMETERIES

Govt facing dearth of land for burials

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

State government is facing a shortage of land even for burial grounds and has been forced to purchase land for this purpose in some cases, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda told the Legislative Assembly on Monday.

Replying to a question by Aurad BJP MLA Prabhu Chavan during Question Hour, the minister said minority communities were unhappy with the government for not providing adequate space for cemeteries. He also highlighted the difficulties faced in allocating land for schools and playgrounds.

"Over the last 10 years, successive governments have tried to ensure burial grounds in all villages based on need. Even the High Court has pursued the matter. Still, we have not been able to provide space in some places," Gowda said.

He added that after distributing available land to farmers and for other purposes, the government now has very little land left.

"In the last three years, the government has purchased land worth Rs 58 crore for burial grounds," he said, adding that the administration now has to go around with a "begging bowl" seeking land. The Revenue Minister further noted that while some Hindus have shifted from burial to cremation due to space constraints, Muslims and Christians require burial grounds, leading to growing discontent. *—PTI*

'17,969 acres Waqf property encroached, most by Muslims'

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

Karnataka Minister for Waqf & Minority Welfare BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan told the Legislative Assembly on Monday that 17,969 acres of Waqf property have been encroached upon in the state, mostly by Muslims themselves.

The Minister was responding to a question by Afzalpur Congress MLA MY Patil during the Question Hour.

"Total Waqf property across the state is 1,12,860 acres, out of which only 20,054 acres is in our hands. 17,969 acres were encroached, 47,263 acres have gone under the Inam Abolition Act and 23,627 acres have gone under the Land Reforms Act," Khan said. Waqf Adalats were held across the State to remove encroachments. Noting that 1,12,860 acres of Waqf land were given by private individuals and organisations, he said encroachments on Waqf property are mostly by the Muslim community itself, not by temples or other communities. *—PTI*

Konkani writer HM Pernal wins Sahitya Akademi Award

MANGALURU, 16 MARCH

Noted Konkani writer and journalist HM Pernal (Henry Mendonca) from Mangaluru has been selected for the 2025 Sahitya Akademi Award for his acclaimed literary work 'Konkani Kavyem: Rupam Ani Rupakam'.

Pernal is the fourth Konkani writer from Karnataka to receive the award. His book Konkani Kavyem: Rupam Ani Rupakam is the first Konkani work in the literary criticism category to receive the award. Earlier, the book had received the Best Book Award from the Karnataka Konkani Sahitya Akademi in 2021 and the Best Book Award from the Goa Konkani Akademi in 2023. Henry Mendonca, a commercial accountant, began his writing career in Kannada through Taranga, Sankramana and Shudra magazines. He entered Konkani literature as a cartoonist in a magazine. He is a famed short story writer, poet, critic, editor and publisher. *—Agencies*

LPG shortage: Minister appeals to people not to panic over supply

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

Residents of Jayamahal collect LPG cylinders in Bengaluru –*MOHAMMED ASAD*

A Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa appealed to the public on Monday not to panic over the LPG supply shortage in the wake of the conflict in West Asia.

Muniyappa affirmed that the government is taking steps to manage the situation and ensure uninterrupted supply to essential services.

The Centre has authorised a daily quota of 9,500 LPG cylinders for the State, to be distributed by oil marketing companies through the existing system, said the Minister.

Of the 9,500-cylinder daily quota, 4,200 are earmarked for essential services and another 4,200 for regular domestic consumption. The remaining 1,200 cylinders are supplied to public institutions, including airports, railway facilities, bus terminals, the Karnataka Milk Federation, and Indira Canteens.

Muniyappa clarified that essential services, such as hospitals, pharmaceutical firms, fisheries, and transport canteens, continue to receive full supplies, totalling roughly 5,200 cylinders each day.

On the issue of hotels, the Minister said, "It is a very important matter. I have said it before and I am saying it again today — hotel owners should be using electric stoves." About 1,000 LPG cylinders per day are being earmarked for the hotel industry.

He also asked people not to resort to panic booking. *—PTI*

REASON UNDISCLOSED

End of an era: B'luru's iconic Hard Rock Cafe to shut down

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

Hard Rock International on Monday announced it has terminated franchise agreements with JSM Corporation Pvt Ltd, leading to the closure of all Hard Rock Cafe outlets and Rock Shops across India, including Bengaluru's iconic music-themed café.

In Bengaluru, the outlets on St Marks Road, at the international airport and in Whitefield will shut down as part of the move.

The closure marks the end of an era for St Marks Road café, long regarded as a landmark in the city's nightlife and live-music circuit. Housed in a heritage building, the venue blended old-world architecture with rock-and-roll interiors and hosted numerous local and international artists.

Its walls displayed rare memorabilia, including a guitar signed by musical greats such as Pink Floyd's David Gilmore.

The company did not disclose the reason for ending the agreements, a decision that effectively dismantles the brand's restaurant footprint in the country.

Other affected locations include Chandigarh, Chennai, Hyderabad, Hyderabad Hitech City, Kolkata, New Delhi and Pune.

In a statement, Hard Rock International said it had "formally terminated its agreements with JSM Corporation Pvt Ltd and related entities covering the right to operate all Hard Rock Cafes and Rock Shops within India".

However, the Hard Rock Hotel Goa will remain open as it is operated separately.

Founded in 1971, Hard Rock Cafe is a global chain of music-themed restaurants, memorabilia shops, hotels and casinos.

These restaurants, hotesla and casinos are present in over countries across the world. *—PTI*

Odisha sees cross voting in RS polls

This is despite MLAs huddling in B'luru; BJP wins two seats; BJD, Independent secure 1

BHUBANESWAR, 16 MARCH

At least five MLAs of the opposition BJD and Congress on Monday reportedly voted in favour of the BJP-supported Independent nominee Dilip Ray in the Rajya Sabha elections in Odisha, for which voting is underway.

BJP won two of the four seats while the Opposition BJD and a saffron party-backed Independent candidate bagged one seat each.

BJP's Odisha unit president Manmohan Samal and the party's MP Sujeet Kumar secured 35 votes each to win the elections.

The polling for the polls was held in the state after a gap of 12 years, as this time, five candidates are in the fray for four seats, which will fall vacant on 2 April. Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Bhakta Charan Das told reporters that three of its MLAs - Ramesh Jena, Dasarathi Gomango and Sofia Firdous - have "voted in favour of BJP".

Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi and BJD chief Naveen Patnaik vote —*PTI*

BJD's Banki MLA Devi Ranjan Tripathy also announced that he voted in favour of the BJP-backed Independent candidate. Another BJD MLA Souvic Biswal's wife Dr Ananya Priyadarshini claimed that her husband voted in favour of Ray. BJD president Naveen Patnaik said, "I have spoken that the BJP and its allies would indulge in 'horse trading'. Those opposition members who voted in favour of the BJP have criminal records and were sent to jail."

Earlier, the polling was halted for about half an hour over a dispute on the issuance of a second ballot paper to a BJP MLA.

The opposition BJD agent objected to the issuance of a second ballot paper to BJP MLA Upasana Mohapatra. Later, Mohapatra was allowed to cast her vote. —*PTI*

COUNTING DELAYED IN HARYANA

CHANDIGARH, 16 MARCH

The counting of votes in the elections to two Rajya Sabha seats in Haryana was delayed on Monday after the BJP and the Congress filed complaints alleging violation of vote secrecy.

The counting was expected to begin at 5 pm after voting ended at 4 pm.

Before the voting ended, minister Krishan Kumar Bedi told reporters that the BJP has complained to the Election Commission regarding the "violation of vote secrecy" of two Congress MLAs, Bharat Singh Beniwal from Ellenabad and Paramvir Singh from Tohana.

"Two Congress MLAs did not have their ballot paper folded as it should have been and thereby they violated the secrecy of their vote. We have complained to the Election Commission," Bedi said.

However, Congress leader Ashok Arora said no complaint was filed at the time these legislators voted, claiming that it was deliberately filed after 4 pm.

He said the Congress too filed a complaint against BJP minister Anil Vij, accusing him of violating vote secrecy.

Congress MLA Bhupinder Singh Hooda said the counting of votes will begin after the EC gives permission. Asked how confident he was about the polls, Hooda said the Congress will win one seat. —PTI

NCP (SP) not to fight against Sunetra: Sule

PUNE, 16 MARCH

Supriya Sule, NCP (SP) working president, announced her party will not field a candidate against Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar in the upcoming Baramati bypoll. The Election Commission scheduled the polls for 23 April after Ajit Pawar and Shivaji Kardile's deaths. Sule clarified, "NCP (SP) will not contest the bypoll against Sunetra Vahini." She added that for Rahuri, Maha Vikas Aghadi partners will decide soon. Maharashtra CM Fadnavis hopes for unopposed polls but said BJP is ready for a contest if needed. Sule retained the Baramati seat in 2024, defeating Sunetra Pawar. She called for a transparent probe into Ajit Pawar's plane crash.—*PTI*

Review Abdullah's security, demands J&K Deputy CM

JAMMU, 16 MAR

Jammu and Kashmir Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary demanded jammer and bullet-proof vehicles following an assassination attempt on NC President Farooq Abdullah. He called for an immediate security review, noting a jammer vehicle was withdrawn six months ago for repairs and not restored. Abdullah escaped gunfire at a Jammu wedding last Wednesday; Kamal Singh was arrested. Choudhary expressed displeasure over handling his security requests, saying, "If the authorities feel my security needs to be upgraded, they should do so." He highlighted recent incidents and called bullets indiscriminate. His office said a bulletproof vehicle requested for his visit was not provided, risking lives given the security scenario.—*PTI*

Kejri, Sisodia get time to respond to CBI plea

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

The Delhi High Court has granted Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and 21 others time to respond to the CBI's plea against their discharge in the liquor policy case. The hearing is scheduled for 6 April. Justice Sharma noted Kejriwal and others did not appear at the first hearing and are seeking more time. Solicitor General Mehta argued that responses shouldn't be delayed over a week, citing the trial court's "perverse" order. Kejriwal's counsel, Hariharan, said they challenged the case in the Supreme Court and had not received a stay. The court will hear the case on 6 April. The court discharged Kejriwal, Sisodia, and others on 9 March, citing lack of admissible evidence. —*PTI*

RJD to fight Kerala polls with LDF: Tejashwi

PATNA, 16 MAR

Tejashwi Yadav, RJD working president, announced his party will contest Kerala assembly elections as part of the Left Democratic Front (LDF). The decision was made after a Mahagathbandhan meeting, ahead of voting for five Rajya Sabha seats. Yadav said, "In Kerala, our party will contest the assembly polls as part of the LDF. We hope to help retain power." The LDF opposes the Congress-led UDF. RJD has 25 MLAs in Bihar's 243-member assembly, supported by 10 Mahagathbandhan MLAs, AIMIM, and BSP. Six candidates are contesting for five Rajya Sabha seats, including RJD's Amarendra Dhari Singh. Rumours of four MLAs "missing" caused concern, but Akhilesh Prasad Singh confirmed they were at his residence, and the Mahagathbandhan was assured of victory .—*PTI*

EC TRANSFERS ASSAM SSPs

GUWAHATI, 16 MARCH

The Election Commission on Monday transferred senior superintendents of police (SSPs) of five districts of Assam, a day after announcement of the assembly poll schedule.

The SSPs of Majuli, South Salmara, Sadiya, Chirang and Dhemaji districts have been transferred with immediate effect, an official notification said. Majuli SSP Haren Tokbi was replaced with Somalin Shubhdarshini, while R Sheetal Kumar replaced Mrinal Kumar Deka of South Salmara.

Sadiya SSP Jagadish Das was replaced with Anchal Chauhan, Chirang's Dhruba Bora with Sudhakar Singh and Dhemaji's Swapnaneel Deka with Mohan Lal Meena.

Elections to 126 assembly constituencies in the state are scheduled to be held on 9 April. —*PTI*

CEC removal notice cites attack on RaGa

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Notices seeking a motion for the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar flag issues ranging from the appointment process to his public attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and instances of alleged manipulation of votes in recent elections, an opposition leader said on Monday.

The notices, submitted in both Houses of Parliament on Friday, seek a motion for Kumar's removal from the CEC's post, as opposition MPs have cried foul over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls and raised concerns over the alleged manipulation of voters' lists on multiple occasions.

According to the Opposition leader, the around-10-page-long notices refer to a dissent note submitted by Gandhi in February 2025, when Kumar was picked for the post.

The notices also mention the CEC's public ultimatum to Gandhi from a press conference in August 2025.

Amid allegations of "vote theft" by the opposition, a combative Kumar had asked the LoP to either apologise or back his claims with a signed affidavit, as required under electoral rules. —*PTI*

TMC calls EC's WB rejig 'panic reaction'

TMC head, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with party leaders during a rally against the LPG price hike in Kolkata, Monday —*PTI*

KOLKATA, 16 MARCH

The reshuffle of senior administrative and police officials in West Bengal by the Election Commission of India on Monday triggered a sharp political divide, with the ruling TMC criticising the move while the opposition BJP and CPI (M) welcomed it.

Addressing a press conference, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh described the reshuffle as a "panic reaction by a party that realises it cannot win elections through democratic means". He alleged that the BJP was using the Election Commission as its "own wing" to carry out hurried transfers of top officials, including the state's chief secretary and director general of police.

Ghosh said that despite what he termed "backdoor politics", the BJP would fail to weaken the bond between the people of the state and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. "Replace whoever you want to; you won't be able to replace Mamata Banerjee. She is the tigress of India," he said, adding that the more the opposition targets her, the stronger the party will emerge.

He also alleged that the EC removed West Bengal's first woman chief secretary in an "arbitrary and undemocratic manner".

The TMC spokesperson further accused the Centre of withholding over Rs 1.96 lakh crore of the state's dues, including funds for schemes such as MGNREGA.

However, Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari welcomed the move, saying the poll panel had restored officials who were sidelined by the Banerjee government for acting against perpetrators of political violence. —*PTI*

EC scraps web camera deal

The Election Commission (EC) has scrapped the contract of the agency that supplied web cameras during the 2021 West Bengal assembly and 2024 Lok Sabha elections after detecting major irregularities in footage, and has selected three new vendors for supply of equipment. The decision to change the vendor was taken after serious discrepancies were found while examining recordings from cameras used in previous elections, the official said. Most of these cameras had been installed at sensitive booths where incidents of violence had been reported on polling day, the source added. —*PTI*

Security scare at Parl as boom barrier falls

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

A technical glitch, apparently caused by strong wind, led to a boom barrier falling down at an entry gate of the Parliament, which activated the security alarm and a quick reaction team (QRT) being mobilised on Monday.

Senior officials of the Central Industrial Security Force, which is responsible for the protection of the Parliament House complex, rushed to the spot and assessed the situation and found that there was no security threat, sources said.

Normal vehicle movement through the gate, near the Vijay Chowk, was resumed after some time.

Sources said the boom barrier, which prevents a direct entry of the vehicles unless lifted, came down automatically, apparently due to a technical glitch caused by a strong wind.

However, a detailed investigation was underway to determine whether the boom barrier came down due to strong wind or its inability to read the entry sticker of a car which was entering the complex at that particular time, sources said.

A QRT, which was stationed nearby, was immediately mobilised, but soon it went back to its original place once the security scare was found to be a technical glitch.

The CISF was brought in to guard the Parliament building located in central Delhi in May 2024, following a security breach in December 2023.

The paramilitary force that functions under the Union Home Ministry has deployed about 3,300 personnel to guard the complex. —*PTI*

'TO CONFUSE PUBLIC'

TVK denies alliance with NDA, blames DMK for 'rumours'

CHENNAI, 16 MARCH

The TVK on Monday dismissed as "false" the claims of talks with AIADMK-BJP to forge an alliance for the Assembly polls and alleged that the ruling DMK was behind rumours to create confusion.

CTR Nirmal Kumar, party Deputy General Secretary, said eyeing political gain, false news was being disseminated by a few media outlets and social media handles.

Claims of talks for an alliance between the TVK and BJP-AIADMK, and parties led by leaders VK Sasikala and S Ramadoss are untrue, Kumar said.

"We would like to make it categorical that no talks of any kind have taken place with any specific parties or political leaders at any level," he said.

This same 'tactic of spreading false news' was employed to link TVK with various political parties, including the Congress, he said.

Nevertheless, such "baseless news" was being spread by "DMK members" to continuously create confusion among the public and workers, the TVK leader alleged.

AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said neither his party nor allies have held talks with the actor-politician **Vijay**-led TVK for the 23 April Assembly polls.

"So far, AIADMK and leaders of its alliance parties have not held talks with the party that you have mentioned," he said. Palaniswami's comment on Sunday is the third such assertion and he had earlier ruled out scope for alliance with TVK and had dismissed it as mere media speculation. —*PTI*

Peace deal with UNLF(P) in force: Manipur Minister

IMPHAL, 16 MARCH

Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam said on Monday that the peace agreement with the United National Liberation Front (P) is in force and that the outfit has 1,435 'verified cadres.'

The outfit signed a peace agreement in November, 2023.

Konthoujam was responding to a query from Congress MLA Surjakumar Okram on present status of peace agreement between UNLF(P), Manipur government and Centre.

"The peace agreement is in force. The total number of cadre of UNLF(P), verified so far, is 1,435. Currently, a stipend of Rs 6,000 per cadre per month is being given," he said.

"The Centre has so far released Rs 5.83 crore in five instalments from December 2023 to April 2024," he added. —*PTI*

BATTLE FOR THE SEAT

WB BJP's 1st list of 144 has Suvendu pitched against Didi

KOLKATA, 16 MARCH

The BJP on Monday released its first list of 144 candidates for the West Bengal assembly polls, fielding Leader of the Opposition **Suvendu Adhikari** from both Nandigram and Bhabanipur, a constituency held by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in a direct challenge to the TMC supremo.

The announcement made in New Delhi signals BJP's attempt to sharpen the electoral narrative around Banerjee versus Adhikari while largely retaining its sitting legislators and inducting candidates from diverse professional backgrounds to broaden its social outreach ahead of the two-phase polls on 23 and 29 April. His candidature from both Nandigram and Bhabanipur is widely seen as the party's most high-stakes decision in the first list, underscoring his role as the BJP's principal field commander in Bengal.

While Nandigram carries deep political symbolism as the epicentre of the 2007 anti-land acquisition movement that propelled Banerjee's rise to power. Adhikari defeated CM there in 2021 by a slender margin of around 1,900 votes.

Bhabanipur, in contrast, is considered Banerjee's political stronghold. She returned to the assembly from the seat in a 2021 bypoll with a margin of more than 58,000 votes.

"I will win both the seats and defeat Mamata Banerjee again," Adhikari said.

Of the 144 nominees, 57 come from fields such as teaching, law, medicine, social work and the armed forces. —*PTI*

Rajeev named in BJP's 1st of 47 candidates for Kerala

NEW DELHI/KOLLAM, 16 MARCH

The BJP on Monday released its first list of 47 candidates for the upcoming assembly polls in Kerala, fielding former Union Ministers **Rajeev Chandrasekhar** and V Muraleedharan from Nemom and Kazhakoottam seats, respectively.

The party also fielded former Union minister George Kurian from Kanjirappally constituency.

According the list, P C George will contest the election from Poonjar assembly seat, R Sreelekha from Vattiyoorkavu and Padmaja Venugopal from Thrissur.

Raji Prasad will join the fray from Kunnathur seat reserved for scheduled caste and R Rashmi will contest from Kottarakkara.

The party has fielded Sobha Surebdran from Palakkad seat, Navya Haridas from Kozhikode North and Kavitha KS from Sulthanbathery, a reserved constituency.

Assembly polls will be held on a single day in Kerala on April 9, while the counting of votes will be held on 4 May.

Meanwhile, RSP, a UDF ally, on Monday announced four candidates for the Assembly election in Kerala to be held on 9 April.

Though the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) has sought five seats, the decision on the fifth seat is still under discussion, leaders said.

RSP state Secretary Shibu Baby John will contest from Chavara in Kollam district. —*PTI*

Stray dogs maul woman to death in Pune

PUNE, 16 MARCH

A 33-year-old woman was mauled to death by a pack of stray dogs in Pune district early Monday, police said. The incident, recorded on CCTV, occurred at around 2am on a service road in Chakan, near the Pune-Nashik Highway. An official from Chakan police station stated, "The woman was walking on the road when a pack of stray dogs suddenly attacked her. As it was late at night, there was nobody around on the road. Unfortunately, she died on the spot." An accidental death report has been registered. The woman has been identified as Shobha Waghmare. *–PTI*

1 dead in landslide, 235 rescued from snow in Kishtwar

JAMMU, 16 MARCH

One person was killed and another injured in a landslide near a hydro-power project in Kishtwar district, while over 230 people were evacuated amid heavy snowfall at Sinthan Top. The landslide, triggered by rain, struck a project site near Dangduru, trapping two workers; one was later found dead, the other rescued and hospitalised. A joint rescue operation by police, Army, and civil authorities evacuated 38 vehicles carrying 235 passengers through severe weather. The operation, led by Kishtwar Deputy Commissioner Pankaj Kumar Sharma, involved the Army's White Knight Corps, who provided food, water, shelter, and medical aid. All institutions outside Kishtwar's municipal limits have been closed as a precaution. *–PTI*

— PTI

Kanye West reschedules Delhi concert to 23 May

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Rapper Kanye West, known as Ye, has postponed his Delhi show due to geopolitical tensions, now set for 23 May. The concert, initially scheduled for 29 March at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, will mark his debut performances in India. Organised by White Fox, Wizcraft, and Plush Entertainment, the event's poster confirmed the new date. A note explained, "Due to the prevailing geopolitical situation and regional tensions, the Ye show in New Delhi will now be rescheduled to 23 May 2026. The safety of fans, the artist and the team remains a priority. All tickets are valid for the new date." Earlier, rapper Flipperachi also cancelled his India tour amid the conflict in West Asia. *–PTI*

— PTI

Andhra CM Naidu unveils statue of Potti Sriramulu

AMARAVATI, 16 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu unveiled a 58-foot bronze statue of Potti Sriramulu, a freedom fighter, on Monday, marking his 125th birth anniversary. Sriramulu's 58-day fast, ending in his death on 15 December 1952, led to the creation of Andhra Pradesh from Madras, for Telugu speakers. The project, costing Rs 150 crore, involved 26 tons of bronze and 42 tons of iron. The statue, erected at Shakhamuru Park, is part of a memorial complex including a museum and gallery, with second-phase development planned. The memorial reflects Sriramulu's sacrifices, cementing his status as 'Amarajeevi' (immortal). *–PTI*

Experts worried as Centre moots bodies to speed up green nod

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

As the Centre has proposed setting up standing bodies to speed up the green clearance process in states and Union Territories, experts have raised concerns about the criteria for selecting members of the new bodies, saying it could lead to a weakened scrutiny of projects.

As per a draft notification issued on 5 March, the new bodies would assume the functions of the State Environment Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAA) and State Expert Appraisal Committees (SEAC) whenever these state-level institutions become non-functional due to the expiry of their tenures.

While the SEIAA grants environmental clearances, the SEAC advises it in appraising projects.

The new bodies, the Standing Authority on Environment Impact Assessment (SAEIA) and the Standing Committee on Environment Impact Appraisal (SCEIA), would comprise "ex officio members," meaning government officials or bureaucrats, nominated by the Centre.

Subhrajit Goswami, a researcher with the Centre for Science and Environment, said, "This bypasses the legal mandate of Appendix VI (Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006), which requires that both the chairman and members possess domain experience, that is, experts with 15 years of experience or a PhD. Administrators emphasise the 'ease of doing business', which may overlook ecological problems a botanist would flag," he added.

Nawneet Vibhaw, a professor at the Jindal Global Law School, said that while ex-officio members may possess technical knowledge, the eligibility criteria had not been clearly defined in the draft notification. *— PTI*

Cuttack govt hospital ICU fire kills 10 patients

11 staffers hurt, short circuit likely cause of 2.30am fire

BHUBANESWAR, 16 MARCH

Ten patients were killed after a major fire erupted in an ICU in the Odisha government-run SCB Medical College and Hospital here early on Monday, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said.

Majhi said that around 11 hospital staffers also suffered burns while rescuing patients. He said that the fire probably originated from a short circuit.

The fire broke out between 2.30am and 3am. Fire service personnel doused the flames.

Prime Minister Modi announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from the PMNRF would be given to the kin of the dead.

Majhi said he has apprised the PM of the rescue operation and the specialised medical services being provided to the injured.

The CM also told the Prime Minister about the judicial inquiry ordered by the state government into the incident.

The CM announced Rs 25 lakh ex-gratia for the next of kin of the dead.

Noting that there were 23 patients at the Trauma Care ICU and an adjacent ICU and ward, the chief minister said seven patients died in the fire, while three others died during the evacuation.

People gather outside the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Odisha' Cuttack after a fire erupted in the hospital's ICU early on Monday—*PTI*

Majhi also announced a judicial probe into the incident and asked the DG, Fire Service, to inquire into the matter and report to him immediately.

The fire service officials, along with hospital staff, police and patients' attendants, rescued the patients.

Majhi said that 11 medical officials joined the rescue operation, risking their lives, and they are now under treatment.

An eyewitness said power supply was cut twice. Then the fire broke out, and the ICU was filled with thick smoke.

Another man said he broke the window glass and poured water to douse the fire before any assistance reached the patients.

"With the help of a nurse, I switched off some electrical equipment and rescued seven patients," he said. *— PTI*

The Gujarat government has decided to allow hotels all over the state to take PNG connections if supply network is available *—PTI*

Gujarat hikes LPG supply by 20 pc

GANDHINAGAR, 16 MARCH

The Gujarat government on Monday said it has ramped up LPG supplies by 20 per cent over normal weekly distribution to ensure uninterrupted supply, while prioritising Piped Natural Gas (PNG) connections in areas with the network. The state has an adequate stock of LPG, and the supply chain remains uninterrupted, said Mona Khandhar, Additional Chief Secretary of the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department.

The official stated that the government has not imposed any restrictions on domestic or commercial use.

The state government has decided to allow hotels across Gujarat to obtain PNG connections wherever the network exists, she said.

"PNG connections are available for both domestic and commercial use, and arrangements have been made so that they can be obtained immediately," the official said.

Khandhar pointed out that the Centre has advised states to prioritise PNG supply in areas where distribution networks are operational.

The state government has directed district collectors and supply officers to coordinate with city gas distribution companies to encourage conversion from LPG to PNG.

Despite this shift in priority, Khandhar said LPG supplies remain adequate, and buffer stocks are steadily increasing.

The state has also permitted limited commercial LPG supply to several sectors, she added. Hospitals and educational institutions have been provided 100 per cent stock against their demand, the official said. *— PTI*

Delhi-bound AI plane diverted to Ireland

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

An Air India A350 aircraft from New York to Delhi was diverted to Shannon in Ireland due to a suspected technical snag on Monday morning.

There were around 300 people aboard the plane which was airborne for nearly six hours before getting diverted to Shannon.

"Flight AI102 made a diversion to Shannon, Ireland, following a technical issue," an Air India spokesperson said.

The aircraft landed safely at Shannon Airport at 0430 hours local time, and all passengers and crew were safe.

Meanwhile, an Emirates flight bound for Dubai from Thiruvananthapuram returned to the Thiruvananthapuram airport on Monday following a security incident reported at the destination airport, an official said.

The Emirates TRV–DXB flight returned midway after Dubai International Airport was closed, a spokesperson of the airport here said.

The flight with 353 passengers and 19 crew members departed at 4.40 am and returned at 8.40 am. He said the passengers would be shifted to the terminal.

Earlier, another Emirates flight, EK533, that departed Cochin International Airport at 4.30 am with 325 people on board, returned and landed in Kochi airport due to the sudden closure of Dubai International Airport. *— PTI*

Bhopal tragedy: SC bins 'mercury leak' plea

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to intervene in a plea alleging the risk of contamination of land and groundwater due to the possible leakage of mercury from incinerated waste linked to the Bhopal gas tragedy.

The court, however, asked the 'Bhopal Gas Peedith Sangharsh Sahyog Samiti' to approach the MP High Court which has been monitoring the rehabilitation.

Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the submissions of advocate Anand Grover, appearing for the victims' association, and said the HC would deal with the plea expeditiously.

In December 1984, around 40 tonnes of methyl isocyanate gas leaked from the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, aiming over 15,000 lives.

The petitioner alleged that the disposal of waste from the former UCC plant site could lead to mercury leaching from the incinerated material contaminating land and water.

Grover questioned the findings of authorities which reportedly detected no mercury in the treated waste.

"With all the incineration, they now say they have detected no mercury at all. After all that, it is dumped in a concrete block. Mercury will leach out now. If there is no order to open it up and test, the exercise is futile," he said.

Justice Bagchi said trial runs conducted by the oversight committee had reportedly shown no evidence of material leaching. *— PTI*

SC to hear PIL for 4-year LLB

The Supreme Court agreed to hear in April a PIL seeking the establishment of a Legal Education Commission to reform the legal education system and consider a four-year LL.B course instead of the five-year course after Class 12. It also added that it cannot decide the matter as it is an academic issue. Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the submissions made by PIL petitioner Ashwini Upadhyay on Monday, who sought the constitution of a commission of jurists to frame the syllabus for legal studies in India. Upadhyay said that in many countries the LL.B course after Class 12 is four years. *–PTI*

No sanction to try Ashoka Prof, Haryana tells SC

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

The Haryana government on Monday told the Supreme Court that it has decided to show magnanimity as a one-time act and close the issue against Ashoka University professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad, who was booked for social media posts on Operation Sindoor.

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for Haryana, told Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi that they have not granted sanction to prosecute professor Mahmudabad.

The bench said that since the state has not granted sanction to prosecute Mahmudabad, the proceedings pending before the court would stand closed. *— PTI*

Kumbh Mela girl's marriage is 'love jihad': Filmmaker

KHARGONE, 16 MARCH

Film director Sanoj Mishra has claimed the marriage of Monalisa Bhonsle, the young woman who gained prominence during the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela, with a Muslim is a case of "love jihad."

After meeting Bhonsle's family on Sunday, Mishra said he would raise the matter with MP Chief Minister Yadav.

Bhonsle, hailing the Pardhi community from Madhya Predesh's Maheshwar, shot to fame after videos of her selling garlands during the 2025 Kumbh Mela went viral.

She married Farman Khan on 11 March at the Nainar Temple at Arumanoor in Kerala. Bhonsle is shooting for her Malayalam debut movie 'Nagamma' near Thiruvananthapuram.

Bhonsle will also feature in his upcoming movie 'The Diary of Manipur', which revolves around religious conversion. *— PTI*

END TO 12-YEAR TRAUMA

Family bids adieu to Rana as SC allows passive euthanasia

GHAZIABAD, 16 MARCH

Meditative chants in the background, a loving hand on his forehead and the calm of words telling him "theek hai"... with that, the family of Harish Rana, in a coma for more than 12 years, prepared for his final journey from their home in Ghaziabad to a Delhi hospital where he will breathe his last.

The 31-year-old is the first person in India to be allowed passive euthanasia. In its judgment last week, the SC also directed AIIMS-Delhi to ensure that life support is withdrawn as per a plan so that dignity is maintained.

Though the exact details of when and how the process will pan out are still unclear, Rana's family is getting ready to say adieu to the young man who fell from a fourth floor balcony in 2013 and suffered severe head injuries. He has been in a coma since.

Ashok Rana, the father of Harish Rana, speaks to the media after the SC allowed to withdraw life support for his son *—PTI*

A video from the Rana home in Ghaziabad shows relatives offering prayers as a member of the Brahma Kumaris puts a 'tilak' on Harish's forehead and says softly, "Sabko maaf karte hue, sabse maafi mangte hue, so jaao... theek hai..." The Brahma Kumari in the video is Sister Lovely from the Mohan Nagar Seva Kendra in Ghaziabad, Komal, a member of the Brahma Kumaris based at Mount Abu, said.

"Although the couple has another son, advancing age had begun to worry them about who would look after Harish once they were no longer able to."

Neighbours said the parents had earlier sold their Delhi house to fund their son's treatment. *— PTI*

— BOLLYWOOD

'BATTLE OF GALWAN' RENAMED

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Bollywood star Salman Khan has announced that his upcoming film, originally titled 'Battle of Galwan,' has been renamed as 'Maatrubhumi'. The film, directed by Apoorva Lakhia of "Shootout at Lokhandwala" fame, is based on the 2020 Galwan Valley conflict between India and China. Khan did not specify the reason for the change in title. The film now features the tagline, "May War Rest In Peace," likely inspired by its first track "Maatrubhumi," sung by Arijit Singh.

"May War Rest In Peace. #Maatrubhumi," Salman posted alongside the film's poster.

The clashes in June 2020 severely strained India-China relations, with 20 Indian soldiers losing their lives. China acknowledged the deaths of five soldiers, although the Chinese casualties were higher.

Khan portrays Bikkumalla Santosh Babu, who sacrificed his life along with 19 soldiers from the 16 Bihar Regiment. On his 60th birthday in December, Salman shared the teaser, which drew criticism from China's Global Times, claiming it exaggerated facts. A government source said, "Cinemas are an artistic expression and India does not restrict it." *— PTI*

LPG TANKER ARRIVES IN INDIA

The Indian LPG carrier Shivalik, carrying about 40,000 metric tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas, arrived at Mundra Port in Gujarat on Monday after safely transiting the Strait of Hormuz earlier in the day. Another tanker, Nanda Devi, is expected to arrive on Tuesday. Together, the vessels are carrying about 92,712 metric tonnes of LPG. There are now 22 Indian-flagged vessels remaining in the Persian Gulf, carrying a total of 611 seafarers —*PTI*

Women's safety, broken promises dominate TN polls

Rising crimes against women, failed poll promises and debt crisis would dominate the 2026 Assembly election in Tamil Nadu, though the ruling DMK banks heavily on its social welfare initiatives and investments to seek the people's mandate for a successive term in office.

Election to the 234-member Tamil Nadu Assembly will be held on 23 April. In the outgoing Assembly, DMK has a strength of 132, while that of the main Opposition party, the AIADMK, stands at 60.

Corruption allegations against some of the state ministers, illegal sand mining, drug menace, and dynasty rule are also among the numerous poll issues raised by various parties including the AIADMK, BJP, PMK and even the Vijay-led TVK.

"The major issue is lack of safety for women and girls due to increasing crimes against them. This is because of the rise in ganja sales in the state," claims BJP state chief Nainar Nagenthran.

Families across the state live in fear and anxiety as the safety of women in Tamil Nadu "plunges to a new low every day during the DMK regime," a senior AIADMK leader claimed.

During his "Makkalai Kaapom, Tamilagathai Meetpom" (save people, redeem Tamil Nadu) public outreach campaign, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami targeted the DMK on a string of issues including the alleged deterioration of law and order, debt crisis caused by the DMK government by borrowing over Rs 5 lakh crore resulting in a debt burden of Rs 1.5 lakh on every child born, failed election promises, dynasty rule, and scams.

Terming the DMK as an "advertisement model governance" to ridicule DMK president and Chief Minister MK Stalin's claims on the performance of the Dravidian model governance, Palaniswami assured to implement the welfare schemes of the previous AIADMK regime if his party was voted to power.

The parties — DMK, AIADMK and the TVK — have lavishly showered freebie promises to the voters, especially women. While the DMK announced to double the monthly entitlement to Rs 2,000 to women heads of family ration cardholders, the AIADMK too assured to provide Rs 2,000 every month if the party was voted to power.

The TVK has promised a monthly financial grant of Rs 2,500 to women heads till 60 years of age, barring central and state government employees, if the party wins the election.

The TVK announced "super six" poll promises for women, including six free LPG cylinders.

The AIADMK promised three free LPG cylinders annually to the rice-drawing ration cardholders in the state, and Palaniswami has assured to provide a one-time ex-gratia of Rs 10,000 to every family to mitigate the impact of inflation and tax hike effected by the DMK regime.

Chief Minister and DMK President Stalin who ensured Rs 5,000 was directly credited into the bank accounts of 1.31 crore women beneficiaries each in the state, accused the Opposition of plotting to halt this entitlement scheme, citing the Assembly election.

He reaffirmed the 10-year vision with which he sought the people's mandate in the 2021 poll and has been highlighting in his speeches how Tamil Nadu was steadily advancing towards that goal.

"No other state has implemented as many transformative flagship schemes at this scale as our Dravidian model government has. Tamil Nadu today delivers all-round performance across sectors, with development reaching every region in a balanced and equitable manner," he asserts.

At a time when BJP-ruled states were distracted by communal polarisation, hate speech and regressive politics, Tamil Nadu stood as a rational, inclusive and development-driven state where social justice fuelled growth, fraternity strengthened progress, and harmony powered prosperity, Stalin had recently said.

Naam Tamilar Katchi chief coordinator Seeman and expelled AIADMK leader and a long-time aide of late chief minister J Jayalalithaa, VK Sasikala, who recently launched her own political party — the All India Puratchi Thalaivar Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam — would fire salvos at the Dravidian majors in a multi-cornered contest in the state.

Tamil Nadu has a voter strength of 5.67 crore, and it would elect 234 MLAs. —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساہر

BJP eyes growth amid Kerala's bipolar politics

For the 9 April Assembly polls, BJP is entering the fray in Kerala with renewed ambition and confidence, drawing on its impressive performance in the recent local polls & the prospects of NDA's expansion —*PTI*

"Will the lotus bloom or not?" is one of the most discussed political questions raised in Kerala during every election, and the upcoming Assembly polls are no different.

For the 9 April Assembly polls, the BJP is entering the fray in Kerala with renewed ambition and confidence, drawing on its impressive performance in the recent civic body polls and the prospects of the NDA's expansion.

It is looking to upset the traditional UDF-LDF cycle of government in Kerala, banking on its local body polls performance, among others.

STRENGTHS

1. Good show in recent civic polls: The party's historic victory in the Thiruvananthapuram City Corporation in the recent civic polls has infused its cadre with fresh energy and strengthened the belief that Kerala is not an unconquerable political territory for the BJP.
2. Image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the broad acceptance he enjoys among various sections of people.
3. The party has taken an early lead with its poll campaign.

WEAKNESSES

1. A long history of electoral setbacks and the difficulty of breaking the traditional bipolar polity in the state, dominated by the ruling CPI(M) and the Opposition Congress.
2. The party will have to find ways to counter the widespread campaign by the CPI(M)-led ruling front against the Centre for not announcing a financial package for the 2024 Wayanad landslide survivors.
3. Criticism over the BJP-led Union government allegedly cutting allocations to the state and for not granting any major projects to Kerala in recent Union budgets.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. A gradual consolidation of support, especially among urban voters, sections of the youth, and certain community groups, could improve the party's prospects.
2. The recent expansion of the NDA, with the entry of influential parties such as Twenty20, will help achieve this target.
3. Party leaders believe that governance and infrastructure development under the Modi government, along with the Centre's welfare schemes, could resonate with voters if communicated effectively.

THREATS/ CHALLENGES

1. Building a broader social coalition in a state with complex community dynamics and a politically aware electorate.
2. While the saffron party has made inroads into certain segments, it still struggles to expand its influence among diverse groups that traditionally support the LDF and the UDF.
3. The reported distancing of minority groups, especially sections of the Christian community, following alleged attacks on nuns and priests in BJP-ruled states in north India, is also seen as a challenge for the party. —*PTI*

Chief Minister of Kerala Pinarayi Vijayan —*WIKIPEDIA*

SIR, infiltration and corruption loom large in WB campaign rhetoric

With the poll season in West Bengal now officially underway, several issues are expected to dominate the campaign rhetoric of political parties in the weeks ahead.

SIR/CITIZENSHIP ANXIETY

The publication of post-Special Intensive Revision (SIR) electoral rolls has triggered one of the most significant pre-election developments in the state in recent years, as the revision pruned nearly 63.66 lakh names from the voter list ahead of the assembly polls.

With the electorate shrinking from 7.66 crore to just over 7.04 crore, the exercise has dramatically altered the state's electoral landscape and introduced a new element of political uncertainty just as the campaign season begins.

Apart from the deletions, around 60.06 lakh additional names are under adjudication, indicating that the voter list remains in flux even as political parties gear up for the polls.

The churn has forced parties to reassess their booth-level arithmetic, particularly in districts where large numbers of deletions have been reported.

The deletions are also concentrated in several border districts and urban belts – areas that are electorally sensitive and politically contested.

INFILTRATION

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi, from a rally in the Muslim-majority bordering district of Malda on 17 January, made infiltration the central plank of his offensive against the TMC government – alleging that large-scale illegal migration altered demography, fuelled riots, and thrived due to the ruling party's "patronage and syndicate raj" – he left little doubt that the BJP would run its election campaigns with the 'ghoospetiya' issue in forefront.

Amid a charged pre-poll political atmosphere, fuelled vigorously by the controversial SIR "roll-cleansing" exercise, the saffron camp has left no stone unturned to justify the process in the name of identifying "Bangladeshis and Rohingyas" on this side of the border.

During one of his recent visits, Union Home Minister Amit Shah sharpened the BJP's pitch on infiltration, declaring that while "only names of infiltrators are being deleted now" from voter rolls, they would be "pushed out" once the party comes to power in the state. He accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of abetting infiltration for poll benefits.

The publication of post-SIR electoral rolls has triggered one of the most significant pre-election developments in WB, as the revision pruned nearly 63.66 lakh names from the voter list ahead of the assembly polls —*PTI*

The TMC, on the other hand, has called the process a politically motivated exercise devoid of truth and reality, which is aimed at targeting the Muslim citizens of the state.

CORRUPTION

Allegations of corruption by the Opposition parties against the TMC dispensation continue to dominate Bengal's political landscape, with the school jobs scam taking centre stage.

The Supreme Court had, in April 2025, cancelled appointments of more than 25,000 candidates as teachers and staff recruited by the state School Service Commission due to irregularities found in the recruitment process.

RELIGION AND POLARISATION

As the campaign for the elections gathers momentum, political observers expect the contest to witness heightened communal rhetoric and identity-driven mobilisation, with religion emerging as a key undercurrent in the electoral narrative.

Bengal, where electoral discourse historically remained relatively insulated from overt communal politics, has gradually been drawn into sharper ideological contestation between the TMC and the BJP.

Both parties have accused each other of encouraging polarisation. The BJP alleges minority appeasement by the ruling party, while the TMC counters by accusing its rival of attempting to divide communities along religious lines.

Against this backdrop, the upcoming elections could witness a more pronounced communal divide in certain regions, particularly in districts with mixed demographic compositions.

Political analysts say the interplay between religious polarisation, the SIR-related voter churn and the anxieties of communities such as the Matuas could together shape the tone and trajectory of the campaign in the months ahead.

LAW AND ORDER/ WOMEN'S SAFETY

The issue of law and order, particularly those related to women's safety, has emerged as a key political flashpoint in Bengal, drawing sharp reactions from both the ruling establishment and the Opposition.

Official data cited by the government indicates that several initiatives, including dedicated women police stations, increased night patrolling and helplines, have been introduced to improve safety. However, incidents like the rape-murder of the medical intern at RG Kar hospital and the alleged gang rape of a student inside the South Calcutta Law College premises have led Opposition parties to argue that incidents of assault, harassment and trafficking continue to spike in the state.

Of the 294-member Bengal assembly, the TMC in 2021 won 215 seats, up four seats from its tally of the 2016 edition of state polls, as against 77 seats won by the BJP, which improved its numbers by 74 seats.

Currently, following multiple defections, resignations and bypolls, the strength of the TMC in the assembly stands at 223 with the support of one more MLA from the Darjeeling-based Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha. Suspended TMC leader Partha Chatterjee continues to remain an Independent MLA in the House.

The BJP's numbers in the state assembly have currently reduced to 64, mostly on account of defections to the TMC. The Indian Secular Front and the newly formed Aam Janata Unnayan Party occupy one seat each. Three seats in the house remain vacant on account of deaths of sitting MLAs. —*PTI*

Nepal hikes petrol prices by Rs 15 per litre

KATHMANDU, 16 MARCH

The Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC), the state monopoly, has increased the prices of petroleum products by up to 15 rupees per litre as tensions in West Asia continue for a third week. The NOC, in its three-page press release, cited rising international market rates driven by escalating tensions in West Asia as the reason for the spike in prices. As per the state monopoly, the price of petrol from Sunday morning has become dearer by NRs 15 per litre, while diesel and kerosene have been raised by NRs 10 per litre. NOC officials said the adjustment was necessary following a rise in global oil prices amid growing geopolitical uncertainties across West Asia. *—ANI*

Cuban activist confined to home amid protests

HAVANA, 16 MARCH

Cuban activist Yoani Sánchez said on Sunday that an alleged policeman dressed in civilian clothes is stopping her from leaving her home in Havana. The accusation comes in the wake of protest in the city of Moron, where a group partially destroyed the local headquarters of the ruling communist party as the island struggles with energy blackouts and food shortages. Sánchez confronted the man in a video published a video on Facebook and argued he was violating her rights. "I am a citizen who has not committed any crimes, is not being judged in a court, does not have a restraining order or house arrest. So, why won't you let me leave?" the activist stated. *—PTI*

End military ops: China on Don's call to open Hormuz

Trump warns NATO of 'bad future' if it fails to help US against Iran

BEIJING/ WASHINGTON, 16 MARCH

China on Monday called on all sides to halt military operations in West Asia as tensions escalate over the closure of the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Responding to US President Donald Trump's appeal for countries to deploy warships to keep the vital waterway open, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said the recent tensions had disrupted global energy flows and harmed regional peace and stability.

The strait — through which about one-fifth of the world's traded oil normally passes — has effectively been closed after Iran restricted passage following US and Israeli air strikes. The disruption has caused one of the largest oil supply shocks in recent years and pushed global oil prices sharply higher.

Trump said he had asked several countries heavily dependent on West Asian oil to join a coalition to secure shipping routes. Speaking aboard Air Force One, he said countries reliant on the strait should help "protect their own territory", noting that the United States imports relatively little oil through the route.

He has appealed to countries including China, Britain, France, Japan and South Korea to deploy naval forces, but the response has been cautious. According to the Financial Times, Trump warned that NATO faced a "very bad" future if US allies failed to assist.

Germany's Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said Berlin had no plans to join the conflict, telling ARD television: "Will we soon be an active part of this conflict? No."

China also confirmed it is in communication with Washington regarding Trump's planned visit to Beijing later this month. Trump suggested the trip could be delayed depending on Beijing's response to his request for assistance.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said several countries had approached Tehran seeking safe passage for their vessels, adding that Iran's military would decide on access. Tehran has said the strait remains open to all except the United States and its allies.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi told parliament that her government "has not heard anything" from Washington about Trump's call to help protect the Strait of Hormuz.

Meanwhile, countries are taking emergency measures to stabilise energy supplies. Japan has begun releasing oil from private reserves, equivalent to about 15 days of consumption, while the International Energy Agency said member states would release nearly 412 million barrels of emergency stocks to ease market pressures. *—PTI*

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-17

Flights halted as Iran strikes near Dubai airport

Fire and plumes of smoke rise after 5 drones struck a fuel tank, forcing a temporary suspension of flights at Dubai International Airport on Monday *—PTI*

DUBAI, 16 MARCH

Gulf states reported missile attacks on Monday after Iran threatened to widen its campaign and called for the evacuation of three major UAE ports. Israel said it continued to hit Iran as Bahrain. Saudi and the UAE said they are trying to intercept projectiles.

Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, said the US attacked Kharg and Abu Musa islands from the UAE. The US Central Command did not respond to Iran's claim.

Anwar Gargash, an adviser to the UAE president, rejected Iran's claim that the US used UAE for attacking Kharg. After the war started, Iranian attacks have killed a dozen civilians in Gulf countries.

In Iran, the ICRC said around 1,300 people has been killed. Iran's Health Ministry says 223 women and 202 children have been killed.

In Israel, 12 people have been killed by Iranian missiles, and more have been injured, including three on Sunday. At least 13 US soldiers have also been killed. Meanwhile, at least 820 people have been killed in Lebanon, and 850,000 have been displaced.

Iran fired missiles towards Israel on Sunday. Several missiles hit central Israel and Tel Aviv. Israel's rescue service released a video showing a large crater in a street.

RAIN MISERY IN LEBANON

In downtown Beirut, displaced families fixed tents battered by wind and rain on Sunday.

Fadi Younes, displaced from Beirut's southern suburbs, told AP that his mattresses and blankets were soaked.

JERUSALEM UNDER ATTACK

Shrapnel from an interception fell on the rooftop of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem, according to the Patriarchate. That's just metres from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the spot where Christian tradition holds that Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected. *—PTI*

> **Trump not sure if Mojtaba is alive**
>
> **I don't know if he's (Mojtaba Khamenei) even alive. So far, nobody's been able to show him. I'm hearing he's not alive, and if he is, he should do something very smart for his country, and that's surrender**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

> **Bibi is alive, says Israel**
>
> **Prime Minister Netanyahu is alive. I saw him personally when I was in Israel more than once. This video at the cafe is not AI-fabricated. There is a lot of disinformation**
>
> —Reuven Azar, Israel's Ambassador to India

US tells citizens to fly out of Gulf commercially

DUBAI, 16 MARCH

The United States International Travel Department updated its travel advisory on Monday, informing American citizens in the region that while commercial flights remain available, sudden cancellations are possible.

Noting that the UAE's land borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman are open, the department said commercial flights from Abu Dhabi and Dubai are currently available to multiple cities in the US and Europe.

However, it warned travellers that commercial flight schedules may change abruptly, urging them to remain prepared for possile sudden disruptions.

The advisory stated, "We are monitoring the situation in the Middle East and will keep you updated so you can make decisions about your safety."

It added that those not leaving by commercial flights should be prepared to shelter in a secure location with essential supplies.

The advisory also reiterated that, "Donald Trump, Marco Rubio, and the Department of State have no higher priority than the safety of American citizens." *—ANI*

US TV networks warned over Iran war coverage

—FREEPIK

WASHINGTON, 16 MARCH

US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman Brendan Carr has warned American news television networks of revocation of broadcast licenses over their coverage of the Iran war, remarks that drew sharp political backlash.

After US President Donald Trump lashed out at the media coverage of the ongoing Iran war, Carr asked news broadcasters to "correct course" and "operate in public interest", failing which they risk losing their licenses.

"Broadcasters that are running hoaxes and news distortions — also known as the fake news — have a chance now to correct course before their license renewals come up," The FCC Chairman said in a post on X on Saturday. *—PTI*

Firefighters try to put out a fire at a private house following a Russian drone attack in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine on Monday *—PTI*

Russia downs 250 Ukrainian drones

MOSCOW, 16 MARCH

Russian air defences intercepted and destroyed 250 Ukrainian drones which were targeting the capital over the weekend, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said on Monday.

The mayor's remarks came as some of the major airports curtailed their operations on Monday morning.

"Thank you to the Ministry of Defence's Air Defence System for your professional and dedicated work," Sobyanin wrote in a social media post, noting that about 250 fixed-wing drones, directly approaching the capital or on the second line of defence, were shot down.

- A massive Ukrainian drone attack on the city began on 14 March. A total of 159 unmanned aerial vehicles were shot down while approaching the Russian capital, leading to airport restrictions.

A massive Ukrainian drone attack on the city began on 14 March. A total of 159 unmanned aerial vehicles were shot down while approaching the capital. It also led to major airports restricting operations on Monday.

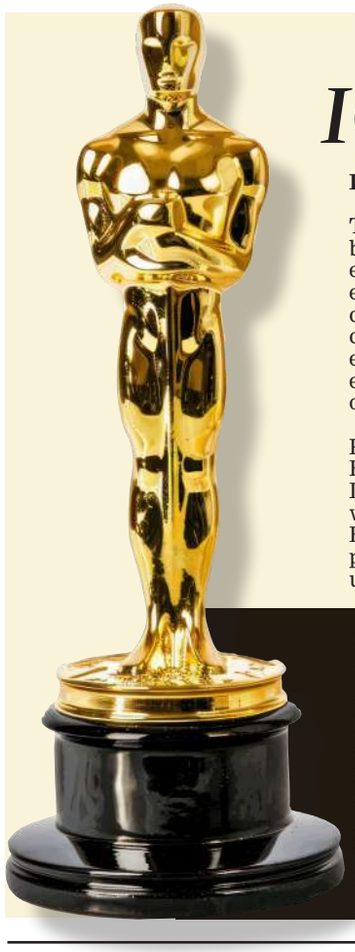
"Due to air safety concerns, the capital's Domodedovo and Zhukovsky airports are currently accepting and dispatching aircraft in coordination with the relevant authorities," the Moskva 24 channel said.

It advised passengers to check their airports' online timetables for possible flight rescheduling. *—PTI*

Countering rumours of his death, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu shared new video of his outdoor stroll. The video follows online debate sparked by Grok labeling a clip of him on Sunday as a '100% deepfake' *—X/NETANYAHU*

THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY IN CINEMA

ICE TO FREE PALESTINE: AN OSCAR FULL OF POLITICS



LOS ANGELES, 16 MARCH

The 98th Academy Awards became a stage for artist-driven activism by Hollywood's elite. The content of Sunday's ceremony proved more political than previous years — even if it lacked direct references to the Iran war and other global issues.

"No to war and free Palestine" said actor Javier Bardem while presenting Best International Feature Film with Priyanka Chopra Jonas. He wore a "No a la Guerra" patch, an anti-war slogan he used during Iraq War protests.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Javier Bardem present during the Oscars on Sunday in Los Angeles *—PTI*

'One Battle After Another' director Paul Thomas Anderson said he wrote the political drama for his children to apologise for the "mess we left in this world we're handing off to them."

Host Conan O'Brien cracked jokes at the expense of the US healthcare system and Kid Rock, referring to the conservative organisation Turning Point USA's alternative Super Bowl halftime show.

While the presence of 'BE GOOD' and 'ICE OUT' pins appeared more subdued compared to last month's Grammys, several attendees donned protest apparel to demand a ceasefire in Gaza, highlighting a growing trend of political expression during the awards season.

Jess Morales Rocketto, whose group pioneered the immigration-themed pins at the Golden Globes, described the trend as a "return to form" for political engagement within the artist community.

Rocketto acknowledged that no pin will create systemic change to US immigration policy. But she likened each individual action to "droplets" in the "giant ocean that we are trying to move." *—PTI*

THE 2026 OSCAR WINNERS...

1.	Best Supporting Actress: **Amy Madigan ('Weapons')**
2.	Best Cinematography: **Autumn Durald Arkapaw ('Sinners')**
3.	Best Original Score: **Ludwig Goransson ('Sinners')**
4.	Best Visual Effects: **'Avatar: Fire and Ash'**
5.	Best Sound: **'F1'**
6.	Best Makeup and Hairstyling: **'Frankenstein'**
7.	Best Animated Feature: **'K-Pop Demon Hunters**
8.	Best International Feature: **'Sentimental Value'**
9.	Best Documentary Feature: **'Mr Nobody Against Putin'**
10.	Best Live Action Short (TIE): **'The Singers' & 'Two People Exchanging Saliva'**

Conan O'Brien opened the 98th Oscars with sharp jabs at Timothee Chalamet's recent criticism of ballet and opera for "struggling to stay alive," then skewered the lack of accountability in the Jeffrey Epstein case.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas presenting the award for Best International Feature Film, her co-presenter, Javier Bardem, stepped away from the script to declare, "No to war and free Palestine".

The biggest snub was Timothee Chalamet - led, 'Marty Supreme' which had 9 nominations, but won none.

'The Singers' and 'Two People Exchanging Saliva' tied for Best Live Action Short Film — the first such tie in 13 years, since 'Skyfall' and 'Zero Dark Thirty' shared Best Sound Editing in 2013.

This year saw the introduction of the Best Casting category, won by Cassandra Kulukundis for 'One Battle After Another'. Autumn Durald Arkapaw made history as the first woman to win Best Cinematography for 'Sinners'. Jessie Buckley became the first Irish performer to win Best Actress ('Hamnet').

Exports dip to $36.61B; Trade gap narrows to $27.1B in Feb

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

The country's merchandise exports dropped marginally by 0.81 per cent year-on-year to USD 36.61 billion in February, and the trade deficit narrowed to USD 27.1 billion compared to the previous month.

The impact of the West Asia crisis will be known in the data for the month of March, as the war began on 28 February. The data will be released by mid-May.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal said exports in March will see a "southward" trend due to the logistical challenges amidst geopolitical tensions.

The joint attack launched by the US and Israel on Iran has disrupted the movement of consignments in international waters. It has led to a significant jump in oil prices, due to which air and ocean freight have risen sharply.

Imports in February increased by 24.11 per cent to USD 63.71 billion due to a jump in gold and silver imports. Inbound shipments of gold rose 218.55 per cent to USD 7.44 billion, while silver imports were up by 285.23 per cent to USD 1.66 billion.

India mainly imports the yellow metal from Switzerland, from where the inbound shipments have climbed 719.3 per cent to USD 2.71 billion in February.

Oil imports were up 9 per cent to USD 12.97 billion during the month.

The trade deficit has narrowed when compared to the previous month, when it was USD 34.68 billion.

However, the gap has widened year-on-year from USD 14.05 billion recorded in February 2025.

As per the commerce ministry data, services exports are estimated at USD 39.53 billion as compared to USD 31.65 billion in January 2025. *—PTI*

Bulls strike after 3 days, Sensex, Nifty rebound

Sensex jumps 938.93 pts, while Nifty climbs 257.70 pts

MUMBAI, 16 MARCH

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded by over 1 per cent on Monday after facing a massive drubbing in the past three trading days, driven by value-buying in blue-chip banking counters.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 938.93 points or 1.26 per cent to settle at 75,502.85. During the day, it hit a high of 75,805.27 and a low of 73,949.76.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 257.70 points or 1.11 per cent to end at 23,408.80.

From the 30 Sensex firms, UltraTech Cement surged 4.22 per cent. Trent, HDFC Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Eternal, Bajaj Finance, ITC, Tata Steel and State Bank of India were among the biggest gainers. Bharat Electronics, Sun Pharma, Power Grid and Bharti Airtel were among the major laggards.

The BSE MidCap Select index dipped 0.36 per cent and Smallcap Select index edged lower by 0.25 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, BSE Top 10 Banks surged 1.61 per cent, followed by Private Banks index (1.38 per cent), Financial Services (1.32 per cent), Auto (1.23 per cent), Bankex (1.08 per cent) and FMCG (0.94 per cent).

BSE oil & gas index dropped 2.29 per cent, hospitals (1.64 per cent), realty (1.51 per cent), energy (1.36 per cent) and healthcare (1.13 per cent).

"Markets started the week on a volatile note and gained over a per cent, snapping their recent losing streak, supported by bargain buying. The rebound largely reflects participants taking advantage of lower levels to accumulate select large-cap stocks after the sharp decline.

Foreign Institutional Investors offloaded equities worth Rs 10,716.64 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors, however, bought stocks worth Rs 9,977.42 crore.

On Friday, the Sensex settled at 74,563.92, down 1,470.50 points or 1.93 per cent. The Nifty tanked 488.05 points or 2.06 per cent to end at 23,151.10. *—PTI*

WORLD MARKETS

DOW (US)	46,568.00	(1.20%)
S&P 500 (US)	6,737.98	(1.27%)
Nasdaq (US)	22,424.92	(1.50%)
Nikkei (Japan)	53,751.15	(0.13%)
Hang Seng (CHINA)	25,834.03	(1.45%)
DAX (Germany)	23,661.69	(0.91)%
FTSE 100 (UK)	10,367.49	(1.04%)
CAC 40 (Paris)	7,956.31	(0.57%)
KOSPI (South Korea)	5,549.85	(1.14%)

AMID SUPPLY CONCERNS

Crude prices rise by ₹119 to ₹9,171/barrel

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Crude oil prices rose Rs 119 to Rs 9,171 per barrel in futures trade on Monday as escalating tensions in West Asia kept supply risks in focus, even as the US explored ways to restore shipping around the Strait of Hormuz.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), crude oil for March delivery increased by Rs 119, or 1.31 per cent, to Rs 9,171 per barrel in a business turnover of 12,745 lots.

Similarly, the April contract also appreciated by Rs 164, or 1.83 per cent, to Rs 9,107 per barrel in 12,898 lots on the MCX.

Analysts said crude oil prices remained elevated amid supply concerns as the ongoing conflict in West Asia disrupted oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, a key passage for global energy shipments.

In the international market, Brent Oil futures for May delivery gained USD 2.82, or 2.73 per cent, to USD 105.96 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for the May contract went up by 2.36 per cent to USD 99.13 per barrel in New York.

Meanwhile, the geopolitical situation remains tense after reports that the United States and Israel conducted fresh airstrikes on a key Iranian export terminal over the weekend.

Traders are now weighing the possibility of further escalation against diplomatic efforts to stabilise shipping in the region, with volatility expected to persist as geopolitical tensions continue to dominate the sentiment. *—PTI*

Silver tumbles Rs 9,000, gold declines Rs 2,950

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Silver prices tumbled by Rs 9,000 to Rs 2.56 lakh per kg while gold prices dropped by Rs 2,950 to Rs 1.60 lakh per 10g in the national capital on Monday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Weak global trends and a stronger US dollar hit the precious metals, analysts said. Silver dropped by Rs 9,000, or 3.4 per cent, to Rs 2,56,500 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Friday's closing level of Rs 2,65,500 per kg. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity extended the losses for the third straight day, depreciating by Rs 2,950, or 1.81 per cent, to Rs 1,60,250 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes). In the international marce level, while silver fell beneath the USD 80 per ounce. *—PTI*

In last 11 yrs, banks wrote off loans worth Rs 9.75L cr

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Banks have written off loans worth Rs 9.75 lakh crore in the last 11 financial years, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said on Monday. The write off peaked in FY20 at Rs 1.59 lakh crore, and since then it has been declining to Rs 47,568 crore in FY25. Banks have written off Rs 31,723 crore in FY15, Rs 40,416 crore in FY16, Rs 68,308 crore in FY 17, and Rs 99,132 crore in FY18, he said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha. In 2018-19, he said, the write off of loans crossed Rs 1 lakh crore to Rs 1.59 lakh crore. The borrowers continue to be liable for repayment, and banks continue to pursue recovery actions, he added. The recovery in written-off loans is an ongoing process, & banks continue pursuing recovery actions initiated against borrowers under various recovery mechanisms available to them, he said. *—PTI*

Indian gas firms offer incentives to promote PNG

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Several city gas distribution (CGD) companies are offering incentives to promote PNG connections, including free gas worth Rs 500 for domestic consumers by Indraprastha Gas Ltd. and GAIL Gas Ltd., waiver off registration charges of Rs 500 for domestic PNG consumers and security deposits for commercial consumers by Mahanagar Gas Ltd., and waiver of security deposits for all commercial connections by BPCL. Commercial LPG consumers in major cities and urban areas are encouraged to switch to PNG, and establishments such as hotels, restaurants, hospitals and hostels can obtain PNG connections through authorised City Gas Distribution (CGD) entities. In a statement, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said consumers can apply for PNG connections through email, customer portals, letters or call centres of CGD companies, and connections can be provided quickly where pipeline networks already exist. The Government is meanwhile expanding the CGD network and PNGRB has advised CGD entities to accelerate deployment of resources, encourage utilisation of existing connections and reduce timelines for supply commencement. In India, all refineries are operating at high capacity and maintaining adequate crude oil inventories. India remains self-sufficient in petrol and diesel production and no imports of these fuels are required to meet domestic demand. No cases of fuel dry-outs have been reported at retail outlets by Oil Marketing Companies. *—ANI*

IndiGo, Adani partner to offer duty-free rewards

AHMEDABAD, 16 MARCH

IndiGo and Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL) have announced a strategic partnership enabling IndiGo BluChip members to earn rewards on duty-free shopping at AAHL-managed airports.

Members can earn five IndiGo BluChips for every Rs 100 spent on pre-booked duty-free products via the Adani platform.

Travellers can browse, reserve and pay online before departure and pick up their purchases at the airport.

The development come months after an operational crisis forced IndiGo to cancel over 5,000 flights in December, affecting 3,64,000 passengers across the country.

The airline's chief executive officer Pieter Elbers also stepped down from his position soon after the incident.

Neetan Chopra, IndiGo's chief digital and information officer, said, "This partnership with Adani Duty Free

strengthens our commitment to offering meaningful rewards beyond flights."

Suchit Bansal, AAHL's CEO - Non-Aero, added, "We are transforming airport shopping with digital discovery, pre-order convenience and seamless collection."

Customers can link their BluChip membership online and receive earnings within 24-48 hours.

The programme covers airports in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Lucknow and Thiruvananthapuram.

IndiGo flies over 2,000 daily routes across 140 destinations, while AAHL operates eight Indian airports. *—ANI*

Wholesale price inflation at 11-month high of 2.13%

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Wholesale price inflation rose to a 11-month high of 2.13 per cent in February, driven by an uptick in prices of food and non-food articles, government data showed on Monday.

This is the fourth straight month of rise in wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation. It was 1.81 per cent in January.

Economists said the WPI inflation is likely to pick up pace further if the oil price rise persists, and spills over to other goods.

Inflation in food articles was 2.19 per cent in February.

Although in vegetables, inflation eased to 4.73 per cent in February, pulses, potato and egg, meat and fish saw an uptick.

Deflation, in the fuel and power basket narrowed to 3.78 per cent in February. Global oil prices averaged USD 68/bbl in February.

Barclays in a research note said the pass-through of the rise in crude oil prices will reflect more in WPI inflation versus retail CPI inflation.

The average price of Indian crude basket up to 12 March 12 touched a 44-month high of USD 101.25/bbl.

Inflation in manufactured products inched up to 2.92 per cent in February. Non-food articles category inflation spiked to 8.80 per cent.

PHDCCI President Rajeev Juneja said a continued policy focus on improving supply-chain efficiencies, lowering logistics costs, supporting domestic manufacturing, and ensuring adequate availability of critical inputs for industry is critical to contain cost-push pressures. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 10P to close at all-time low of 92.40 against USD

MUMBAI, 16 MARCH

The rupee weakened by 10 paise to settle at a fresh record low of 92.40 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday amid surging crude oil prices and incessant withdrawal of foreign funds triggered by geopolitical uncertainties.

The local currency, however, resisted a sharp fall backed by a significant recovery in domestic equity markets amid hopes of the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.44 and touched its lowest-ever intra-day level of 92.47 against the greenback during the session.

The local unit ended the session at 92.40 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 10 paise from its previous close.

In the preceding session, the rupee hit its lowest intra-day level of 92.47 before ending at 92.30 against the dollar, its lowest-ever closing level until Friday.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said that some softness in the US dollar index and hopes of the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz cushioned the downside.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.13 per cent lower at 99.97. *—PTI*

₹164 cr paid to passengers hit by IndiGo fiasco, says Naidu

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

Compensation of Rs 163.92 crore in the form of travel coupons has been given to passengers who suffered due to the cancellation of flights by IndiGo in December, Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu informed the Rajya Sabha.

He said the government is taking multiple necessary measures to ensure that such incidents do not occur.

Hundreds of flights by IndiGo were cancelled during the first week of December due to a shortage of pilots after the expiry of the deadline on flight duty time limitations (FDTL). The government has

blamed the airline for the lack of adequate planning in implementing the second phase of the FDTL norms. A total of

Rs 163.92 crores was disbursed to provide Rs 10,000 of coupons or travel coupons to each of 3,64,000 passengers.

He said the Director General of Civil Aviation has been in continuous engagement with the airline. Whenever there is a new schedule that has been approved, we have multiple sittings with it, he noted.

He said the Ministry is consulting and discussing with airlines on a day-to-day basis before the implementation of new norms.

"More than 246 pilots have been employed in this three months itself by IndiGo...," Naidu said. *—PTI*

Vedanta panel approves raising ₹2,575 cr via NCDs

NEW DELHI, 16 FEB

Vedanta Ltd on Monday said its committee of directors has approved raising up to Rs 2,575 crore through the issuance of debentures.

The fundraising is part of Vedanta's efforts to diversify funding sources and strengthen its balance sheet as it continues to refinance debt and reduce borrowing costs.

The committee has approved the allotment of 2,57,500 unsecured, redeemable, rated, listed, non-convertible debentures of face value of Rs 1,00,000 each, aggregating to Rs 2,575 crore on a private placement basis, a BSE filing said. Vedanta has seen strong investor interest in recent debt issuances.

In October 2025, its $500 million bond issue was oversubscribed three times, while an NCD offering in June, 2025 saw nearly 60 per cent oversubscription. Vedanta Resources Ltd, the parent of Vedanta Ltd, has reduced net debt to about $4.8 billion as of December 2025 from about $8.9 billion in March 2022.

The sustained investor interest comes amid robust operating performance across businesses, supported by higher volumes, cost efficiencies and favourable commodity trends. *—PTI*

AMID WEST ASIA WAR

PhonePe temporarily holds IPO listing process

NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH

PhonePe on Monday announced it has temporarily deferred its public market listing process due to the current geopolitical conflicts and market volatility and will resume the listing process once there is some stability in global capital markets. Sameer Nigam, PhonePe's CEO said, "We sincerely hope for a swift return to peace in all the affected regions. "

TRAVELSTACK, LEARNFLUENCE, TEA POST

Three companies — travel technology firm Travelstack

Tech, Learnfluence Education, which operates the 'Lakshya' coaching centres, and tea cafe chain Tea Post —have received approval from Sebi to raise funds through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), according to an update from the market regulator on Monday.

Meanwhile, Rays Power Infra, Madhur Iron & Steel and Arjun Jewellers saw their documents "withdrawn or returned" during March 9-13, the update showed.

The development comes at a time when Indian equity markets are under pressure due to the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

So far this year, 12 companies have tapped the IPO market to raise funds. One issue is currently underway, while few others are expected to hit the market soon.

Travelstack Tech's proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue worth Rs 250 crore, Learnfluence Education's proposed IPO consists of a fresh issue aggregating up to Rs 246 crore and Tea Post's IPO comprises a fresh issue of up to 1.43 crore equity shares & an OFS of up to 1.43 crore equity shares. *—PTI*

Sinner and Aryna claim their first titles at Indian Wells

Sinner beat Medvedev for ninth time in their last 10 matches

INDIAN WELLS, 16 MARCH

Jannik Sinner beat Daniil Medvedev in the Indian Wells final 7-6 (6), 7-6 (4), winning seven straight points to rally from a 4-0 deficit in the second-set tiebreak and claim the title without dropping a single set.

The No. 2-ranked Italian beat Medvedev for the ninth time in their last 10 matches to claim his first title at the California desert tournament. Medvedev handed top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz his first loss of the year in the semifinals of the BNP Paribas Open.

He is now only the third player in history to win all six ATP Masters 1000 hard-court titles, joining Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer. Furthermore, with his first title of the year, he became the first player since 1990 to win consecutive Masters 1000 titles without dropping a set and extended his winning streak in this category to 11 matches, dating back to his Paris title last November.

Sinner congratulated fellow Italian Kimi Antonelli, who won Formula One's Chinese Grand Prix earlier Sunday.

"It has nothing to do with tennis, but it has been a special day for Italy," Sinner said. "Because I'm a huge Formula One fan and having a very, very young Italian, Kimi, bringing Italy back home at the top, it's amazing. So, thanks, Kimi, thanks Formula One, and see you next year." World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka beat Elena Rybakina 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (6) in the women's final Sunday for her first Indian Wells title.

Aryna Sabalenka –PTI

Jannik Sinner –PTI

Sabalenka, a runner-up in 2023 and '25, finished off the win with a big serve that Rybakina hit long. It was a sweltering afternoon on the court as the temperatures soared into the 90s. The 27-year-old Sabalenka had a chance to close out the third set but was broken at 5-4. Rybakina found herself with a championship point in the tiebreaker, only to have Sabalenka hit a backhand winner.

"I think the whole idea going into this match was to be mentally strong, to stay strong, no matter what, to show with the body language that I'm here, I'm fighting," Sabalenka said in a post-match interview on the Tennis Channel. "You have to get a win with incredible tennis, and that was the whole idea going into this one. I'm happy that it really worked." It's been quite a stretch for Sabalenka. First, a puppy and then an engagement ring from Brazilian businessman Georgios Frangulis.

Now, a title in the desert.

"I'll remember it for the rest of my life," she said.

This marked the 16th time the two players have met, with Sabalenka now holding a 9-7 advantage. Rybakina of Kazakhstan beat Sabalenka at the 2025 WTA Finals championship and the Australian Open two months ago. She also edged Sabalenka in the finals at Indian Wells in 2023.

"It was a very difficult match," Rybakina said after the match as she congratulated Sabalenka. There's not much time to celebrate for Sabalenka, who was set to leave Sunday night for the Miami Open, where she's the defending champion. "Probably will have a couple of drinks on the plane and that's it," Sabalenka said. I have to bring my best tennis there. But with these vibes that I'm taking from here, I think I'll be able to be there and to fight and to do my very best. —*PTI*

IPL 2026

Lasith Malinga and Shardul Thakur, Mahela Jayawardene –PTI

MI begins preparatory camp

MUMBAI, 16 MARCH

Five-time champions Mumbai Indians on Monday began training for the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League, which will start on 28 March.

Shardul Thakur, Mayank Markande, Allah Ghazanfar, Naman Dhir, Raja Angad Bawa, Robin Minz, Raghu Sharma, Mayank Rawat, Danish Malewar, Mohammad Izhar, and Ashwani Kumar were the first group of players to arrive for training.

The remainder of the squad, which includes the likes of Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, and skipper Hardik Pandya, is expected to join the camp in the coming days as preparations build in intensity ahead of the tournament.

"There's always something special about the first day of pre-season. You see the players walk in, the energy builds, and the objective is to start strong. We've got the boys who know this franchise inside out, and we have got some exciting new faces coming in," MI head coach Mahela Jayawardene said.

Rohit Sharma –PTI

"Day one sets the tone for the entire campaign. We wanted everyone to feel the intent from the very first session, in how we train, how we prepare, and how we show up for each other. The first session is always exciting, but it's also the start of something serious, and we know what we're building towards." The session opened with a structured fitness and conditioning block, with the strength and conditioning team putting players through their paces with movement drills, agility work, and fitness assessments. MI, who had reached the playoffs last season, will open their 2026 campaign against KKR on 29 March at the Wankhede Stadium. —*PTI*

U-19 WC final knock was special: Sooryavanshi

JAIPUR, 16 MARCH

India's teenage cricket sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi on Monday described his match-defining century against England in the Under-19 World Cup final as one of the most "special" knocks of his budding career, a memorable innings that played a decisive role in India lifting the title. Sooryavanshi smashed a stunning 175 off just 80 balls to power India to a record-extending sixth U-19 World Cup title.

"My personal favourite is the final knock in the U-19 World Cup (in Harare). I could only play one U-19 World Cup. It was a proud moment for me to score a hundred in the final," he said. "What I contributed for the team in the final was special," he said on the sidelines of an event to unveil the new jersey of Rajasthan Royals.—*PTI*

Guj HC disqualifies Kiran More from contesting BCA polls

AHMEDABAD, 16 MARCH

The Gujarat High Court on Monday disqualified former India cricketer Kiran More and three others from contesting the Baroda Cricket Association (BCA) elections, setting aside the election officer's decision to accept their nomination papers for various office-bearer posts. Justice Niral R Mehta allowed a plea that cited a Supreme Court judgment regarding the candidates' completion of a nine-year cumulative tenure in a cricket body and mandatory cooling-off periods.The court set aside the action of the election officer in accepting the nomination forms of More, Amul Jikar, Anant Indulkar and Amar Petiwale for the post of office bearers and publication of their names in the final list.—*PTI*

FIH NATIONS CUP

Indian women's hockey team to play in June

LAUSANNE, 16 MARCH

The Indian women's team will feature in the FIH Hockey Nations Cup to be held in Auckland, New Zealand, from June 15 to 21.

The Hockey Nations Cup was launched in 2021 to offer a top-level competition to the best-ranked teams not participating in the Hockey Pro League, and give the winning team an option to be promoted to it the following season.

The Indian women's hockey team was relegated from the Pro League 2024-25 after finishing at the bottom of the nine-team standings. Apart from India, hosts New Zealand, USA, Japan, Korea, Chile, Scotland, and France, who were promoted via the Hockey Nations Cup 2, will take part in the event. The men's event will be held in Cape Town and will involve South Africa, New Zealand, France, Korea, Japan, Wales, Malaysia, along with Scotland, who were promoted via the Hockey Nations Cup 2, as well as Ireland, who were relegated from the 2024-25 season of the Hockey Pro League. The 2025-26 edition of the Hockey Men's Nations Cup will run from June 11 to 20 and will mark the return of the competition to South Africa, which hosted the inaugural edition of the men's competition in Potchefstroom in 2022. Following the confirmation of the hosts for the fourth edition of the Hockey Nations Cup, FIH President Tayyab Ikram said: "We are delighted to have two outstanding host nations and cities for these remarkable tournaments." —*PTI*

Veer recalls Dhoni's first lessons at CSK pre-season camp

MUMBAI, 16 MARCH

MS Dhoni's first piece of advice to CSK's INR 14.20 crore recruit Prashant Veer was not about field placements or finishing games. It was about money.

Prashant revealed that the CSK legend's early counsel was refreshingly practical. "Right now, we haven't spoken much about cricket. He told me to save my money and not spend it unnecessarily," he said with a smile after the inauguration of the 12th Pavit Singh Nayar Memorial All India inter-college T20 tournament at the Guru Nanak College on Monday.

The 20-year-old all-rounder was clear about one thing when it comes to his batting role. "I can bat in any situation. Just as long as I don't have to open, I will do it anywhere else," he quipped.

For Prashant, the initial days in the camp have been about soaking in the environment and learning from those around him. "The environment is very good, and everyone is very supportive. It feels good to mingle with them and play together. It's a great feeling for me, my family, and my village (Sahajipur, UP). I'm really blessed to be here."

Prashant Veer –PTI

CSK appoints James as fielding coach

Former England wicketkeeper-batter James Foster was on Monday appointed as the fielding coach of Chennai Super Kings ahead of the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League.

Foster will join the coaching staff of Chennai Super Kings, led by former New Zealand national cricket team captain Stephen Fleming, with Michael Hussey serving as batting coach and Eric Simmons as the bowling coach.

Hardik must unleash his real version: Harbhajan

Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh feels Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya needs to "unleash his real version" and lead from the front if the five-time champions are to mount a strong challenge in the upcoming IPL.MI, led by Pandya, will be aiming to end their five-year trophy drought and become the most successful franchise in the league's history."I think Hardik Pandya needs to unleash his real Hardik Pandya version. He needs to bring his A game to the table. Once he starts playing his A game, not just as a batter but as a bowler as well, it will make a huge difference," Harbhajan told JioHotstar's 'Game Plan."We saw him bowl in the T20 World Cup. He was brilliant with the ball. That is what he needs to do in the IPL as well. —*PTI*

Ayush, Tanvi to lead Indian challenge at Orleans Masters

ORLEANS , 16 MARCH

Youngsters Ayush Shetty and Tanvi Sharma will lead India's challenge at the USD 250,000 Orleans Masters Super 300 badminton tournament beginning here on Tuesday after senior shuttler HS Prannoy pulled out due to a shoulder injury.

Prannoy, who was originally slated to face top seed Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei in the opening round, was forced to withdraw after experiencing shoulder pain during the Swiss Open in Basel last week.

While the cause of his discomfort was unclear initially, the Indian had decided to pull out of his match against Japan's Koki Watanabe to avoid aggravating the injury."The shoulder pain developed after travelling to the Swiss Open.

We didn't know the reason then, so I decided to withdraw and fly back," Prannoy told PTI."After a scan, it showed a slight tear. It is a minor thing, and hopefully I should be okay soon," added the seasoned pro, who is targeting a return at the Asian Championships to be held from April 7 to 12 in Ningbo, China.

While Prannoy will miss the event, the rest of the Indian contingent will look to make a deep run in the tournament.All eyes will be on eighth seed and world No. 25 Ayush Shetty, who won the US Open Super 300 last year, as he opens his campaign against Lee Chia Hao of Chinese Taipei.Former world No. 1 and currently ranked 30th, Kidambi Srikanth, who reached the finals of the Malaysia Masters Super 500 and Syed Modi International Super 300 in 2025, will face Denmark's Magnus Johannesen. Tharun Mannepalli, fresh from a quarterfinal finish at last week's Swiss Open, takes on Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu Wei in his opening game.World No. 42 Kiran George, who stunned Singapore's former world champion Loh Kean Yew at the Swiss Open, will face third seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan. —*PTI*

TCS WORLD 10K BENGALURU

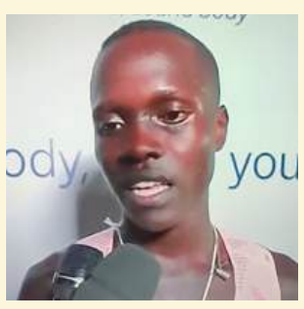
Ugandan Kibet, Muktar Edris to headline

BENGALURU, 16 MARCH

Ugandan Harbert Kibet and two-time 5000m world champion Muktar Edris of Ethiopia will headline the 18th edition of the TCS World 10K Bengaluru, scheduled for 26 April.

The World Athletics Gold Label Race boasts a total prize purse of USD 210,000, with USD 26,000 for the winner in the men's and women's categories, along with significant bonuses for course record performances.

Headlining the men's category is Kibet. The 20-year-old Kibet, a finalist at the World Junior Athletics Championships two years ago, made his first appearance in the 10K earlier this year, winning emphatically in the Spanish town of Castellon with a world-leading 26:39, which is the sixth-fastest time ever for the event.



While Kibet is one of the five athletes entered with a sub-27-minute time this year, a total of 11 athletes with personal bests faster than the Bengaluru course record of 27:38 are also in the fray.

"It is my first time in India, and in the TCS World 10K Bengaluru, I want the most out of it as I am in tremendous form," Kibet said in a media release.

He will face a stiff challenge from Ethiopian Khairi Bejiga (26:51) and two platinum-level runners, Rodrigue Kwizera of Burundi and another Ethiopian, Gemechu Dida.

Kwizera was a silver medalist in Bengaluru two years ago, while Dida took a notable second spot in the RAK half-marathon in early 2026.

Similarly, his teammate Tadese Worku, the fifth runner to clock sub-27 minutes, is also familiar with the Bengaluru roads. —*PTI*

Argentina vs Spain in Qatar called off

NYON, 16 MARCH

UEFA said that the game between Argentina and Spain, known as Finalissima, which was supposed to be held in Qatar, has been cancelled after the widening Middle East war.

The game between South American champion Argentina and European champion Spain was scheduled to be held in Doha on March 27. It was going to be a marquee matchup between the teams led by Lionel Messi and Lamine Yamal before this summer's World Cup in North America. But the security of the game was put into serious doubt when Iran intensified its attacks on neighbouring countries in retaliation for the aerial attacks by the United States and Israel that are now in their third week.

After much discussion between UEFA and the organising authorities in Qatar, it is announced today that due to the current political situation in the region, the Finalissima between UEFA EURO 2024 winners Spain and CONMEBOL Copa América 2024 champions Argentina cannot be played as hoped in Qatar on 27 March. —*PTI*